
Foreign Comparative Testing Program

By

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Picture this; you are deployed overseas in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom on a mission with other coalition forces. As you engage the enemy through coalition operations, you notice that your coalition partners have a piece of equipment that really makes a difference. You wish your military service had that piece of gear and wonder, how soon could I get my hands on that equipment, and what would it really take to get the item into service?

What if I was to tell you that U.S. warfighters can rapidly (six months to three years depending on the item and restrictions) get their hands on superior foreign equipment and technology they see while serving in friendly foreign countries around the world? What if I were to tell you that this includes the time to test and field the equipment? The answer, we can do just that via the Foreign Comparative Testing (FCT) Program managed from Comparative Testing Office (CTO) in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics). From bullets to aircraft loading equipment to nanotechnology, the FCT program provides funding for test articles and the testing and evaluation of foreign equipment. Additionally, since the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Congress approve the projects, procurement funding is virtually locked-in for the specific projects. FCT gives the U.S. warfighter a way to acquire needed assets within 6-24 months of submitting a proposal. Candidate projects are submitted annually to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) by June, and funding is normally released by mid-October. With a two year test to procure goal, the FCT program saves time, money and effort versus the lengthy traditional acquisition cycle.

Since its inception in 1980, the Foreign Comparative Testing Program has funded over 528 projects with \$932 million, resulting in procurements in excess of \$6.7 billion in fiscal year 2005 constant year dollars. Fifty-five million dollars has been awarded to the USAF over the past twenty years, resulting in procurements in excess of \$1 billion.

Through the FCT Program, all of the military services are afforded the opportunity to leverage our allies' technologies, and provide the warfighter with much needed equipment, in a rapid manner. Each military service has a program office dedicated to supporting the FCT Program. The efforts of each program office allow the program to grow stronger and gain support and interest from warfighters and foreign vendors alike. The representatives from each of the military services attend all major international Air Shows, as well as conduct industry tour of various nations, looking for equipment that could satisfy the needs of the Airmen, Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines.

Successful FCT projects result from world-class foreign defense items produced by allied and other friendly countries, strong U.S. user advocacy and support, a valid operational requirement, and solid procurement potential. Many FCT projects have reduced the total ownership cost of military systems, cutting overall acquisition and support expenditures while enhancing standardization and interoperability, improving allied cross-service support, and promoting international cooperation and interoperability.

The USAF has always played a major role in the FCT Program by identifying allied and friendly-nations resources as a solution to our shortfalls. Examples of USAF FCT programs are:

- Next generation small loader: The USAF had a requirement to acquire a 25K loader, which could be used with our cargo aircraft. Two foreign sources were identified with potential equipment to fulfill the requirement. After rigorous testing of the equipment, in accordance with USAF standards, a single candidate was qualified as best value for the USAF, and procured.

- MEMS Inertial Measurement Unit: The Micro-Electro Mechanical System Inertial Measurement Unit was the solution to creating a better guidance system, which was smaller, lighter, and more efficient, allowing missile systems to carry a larger, heavier payload.

- 20 MM Replacement Rounds: The USAF 20MM rounds had been condemned to “emergency use only”, due to misfiring in the chambers, putting USAF pilots and aircraft at risk. Two foreign sources were identified to fulfill this shortfall, and were tested in accordance with Department of Defense standards and requirements to identify the best replacement rounds to fill the USAF stockpile.

There is a complementary domestic program to FCT called the Defense Acquisition Challenge Program (DACP). The purpose of DACP is very similar to FCT, but DACP focuses solely on getting domestic solutions rapidly to the warfighter.

For more information on these two special programs, go to <http://www.safia.hq.af.mil/fct> for the USAF Foreign Comparative Testing Program and <http://www.acq.osd.mil/cto/> for the Defense Acquisition Challenge Program (DACP).

About the Author

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